THE GARDEN CALENDAR

A radio talk by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered through WRC and 42 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, Tuesday, May 19, 1931, at 12:54 p.m., Eastern Standard Time.

Hello Folks.- Well, we had what the old gardeners call "a planting season" in the soil here around Washington last week and as the saying goes "everything is looking up." Those rains were a boon to market gardeners who grow tomatoes, peppers, sweetpotatoes, and other crops of which the plants are transplanted. Many a gardener and his helpers worked 14 to 16 hours a day last week setting plants and it is needless to say that these folks didn't need any lullabys or rocking to put them to sleep when with aching backs and tired muscles they retired at night. Many gardeners are employing plant setting machines for planting cabbage, tomatoes, sweetpotatoes and tobacco, and these machines where properly used are great labor savers and eliminate most of the backache from the job of plant setting.

You know the chief ambition of every successful gardener is to be early in everything he does. He is up early in the morning, he plants his crops just as early in the season as he dares and sometimes Jack Frost calls his dare; then he has to plant all over again. He used to start to market at 1:00 A.M., or perhaps the night before and travel for hours behind a slow team in order to be at the market on time. Today he starts his early plants in a greenhouse or in heated beds and calmly awaits warm weather before setting them in the field; he sleeps until about an hour before time for the market to open then climbs to the seat of a four or five ton truck loaded with produce and is at the curb in his allotted space when the market opens, he sells out, perhaps, and by noon is home again.

It is not all earliness, however, that counts in gardening today for it often happens that some late maturing crop brings home the money. Take late tomatoes, for example. Prices nearly always take a jump after frost has killed the tomato vines in the fall. Many gardeners are now planting special late crops of tomatoes which are gathered in the green stage just before frost kills the vines in the fall and are ripened in storage.

Mr. R. C. Wright, one of the workers in our transportation and storage section, in a recent Yearbook article on the proper handling and storage of late tomatoes for ripening, says, that "proper handling and storage methods are necessary if attractive tomatoes of good quality are to be had. The local gardener who attempts to supply ripe tomatoes for the market after frost, and who wishes to compete in any degree with the shipped tomatoes that are usually on the market at this time, must display an equally attractive product.

"Tomatoes that are from plants that have passed their period of best production and are more or less spent are inclined to be soft and watery and

will not ripen or keep as well as the firmer fleshed fruits from plants in full vigor." To make a long story short, if you want to be in the market with storage ripened tomatoes you should by all means plant a special late crop for the purpose. When I was a boy on the farm we used to pull up some of the best of our late tomato vines just before frost and hang them in the cellar to ripen their fruits. Today many gardeners are storing green tomatoes for ripening and are finding the practice profitable. The main points are to grow good, sound, late fruit for storing then handle the fruits very carefully to avoid bruising or the breaking of the skin. The fruit is stored on shelves or on slat bottom trays in a clean, dry cellar or storage house that can be kept rather dark and at a temperature from 55 to 70 degrees according to the rapidity desired in ripening.

Mr. George N. Darrow, another of our horticultural workers, has just returned from the strawberry shipping sections of the South Atlantic Coast, and reports that the new Blakemore strawberry, introduced by the Department a couple of years ago, is proving even better than was anticipated. It has excellent habits of growth, the fruit is well colored, firm, good flavor, and stands shipping well so that growers, dealers and consumers all like it. It is one of the best of our strawberries for canning and preserving.

We are frequently asked "when is the best time to set strawberry plants?" Well, it is largely a matter of local conditions. Fall planting is all right for sections where the plants will be continuously protected during the winter by a blanket of snow, also in sections where the ground freezes very little during the winter, but whereever the ground alternately freezes and thaws the plants should be set in the spring. Strawberry plants can be set any time in the spring or early summer if moisture conditions are suitable, or where irrigation is available.

We have five bulletins on strawberries, one for the Western States, one for the Eastern States and one for the Gulf Coast region. In case you apply for a bulletin on the growing of strawberries we will send the one that applies to your section. We also have a bulletin on Strawberry Varieties in the United States and a small bulletin on Everbearing Strawberries.

I have just received a little mimeograph circular issued by the Extension Division of the Georgia State College of Agriculture at Athens, Georgia, calling attention to the outlook for a big crop of peaches this year and the desirability of thinning the fruit on the trees in order to produce peaches of proper size for best results on the markets. It is stated in this circular that growers who have thinned in the past have found the cost of thinning quite low as compared with the difference obtained for the larger fruit. It is generally conceded that it pays to thin rather than handle a large amount of small and unsalable fruit at picking time.